PORTER FOX

THE LAST STAND OF FREE TOWN

THE MICRO-NATION CHRISTIANIA HAS BEEN THREATENED FROM WITHOUT BY THE DANISH GOVERNMENT FOR DECADES; NOWADAYS, IT IS EQUALLY MENACED BY SCHISMS FROM WITHIN.

DISCUSSED: *Bush-Inspired Conservatism in Europe, The Infamous Pusher Street, Muhammad Cartoons, Fairy Tale Kingdoms, Nuke-Hungry Ayn Rand Followers, Adaptive Reuse Laboratories, Sticks of Afghan Crème, The Very High Morals Required to Maintain Anarchy, Lynch Mobs, A Pile of Woodchips, Foucault*

The concentric boulevards and tidy row houses of downtown Copenhagen instill an overwhelming sense of order in Denmark's capital city. There are no beggars lurking in alleyways or vendors hawking trinkets on the sidewalk. At night, blaze-orange street cleaners buff cobblestones to a dull sheen while workers blast graffiti off walls with an environmentally friendly jet of pressurized ice crystals. The effect is so striking that on a spring morning with the sun reflecting off the spires of Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen appears more like a fairy-tale kingdom than the largest metropolis in Scandinavia.

So it was with some surprise that Danes turned on their television sets on May 14, 2007, to see fires burning in their capital's streets and gangs of police officers beating their countrymen with billy clubs. The worst of the fighting flared up along Prinsessegade Road in the Christianshavn neighborhood. A column of black transport vans filed into the street as residents hurled Molotov cocktails, rocks, and fireworks at police. Officers retaliated with batons and tear gas, and by that afternoon, the seventeenth-century streets had disappeared under a thick cloud of smoke.

The site was an ironic flashpoint for violence. Prinsess-

Photo credit TK

egade Road marks the northern border of a pacifist commune that has existed in Christianshavn since 1971. That year, a group of squatters overtook an abandoned army base east of Prinsessegade, barricaded the roads, outlawed cars and guns and created a self-ruling micronation in the heart of Copenhagen. They called the eighty-five-acre district Christiania Free Town, drew up a constitution, printed their own currency, banished property ownership, legalized marijuana, and essentially seceded from Denmark. The traditionally liberal Danish government allowed the settlement at first, dubbing Christiania a "social experiment." Then it spent the next three decades trying to reclaim the area. Thirty-nine years and a dozen eviction notices later, the nine hundred residents of Free Town represent one of the longest-lasting social experiments in modern history.

At the turn of the millennium, Denmark, the first country in the world to legalize pornography and gay marriage, suffered the same wave of Bush-inspired conservatism that swept through much of Europe. (The Danes sent a submarine to support Operation Iraqi Freedom.) In 2001, the Folketing—Danish Parliament—landed in the hands of a conservative coalition for only the second time in eighty-five years. The coalition (headed by Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen) and its austere policies on immigration were viewed by voters as necessary correctives to a lenient program that had led to an overburdened welfare system. On the heels of the controversial Muhammad cartoon incident, Rasmussen's government gained public support on its promise to put the Dane back in Danish.

The next item on the party's to-do list—an initiative that had frustrated conservatives for more than three decades—was to eradicate Christiania once and for all. It took just three years to pass parliamentary law L205 and begin what conservatives called the "normalization" of Free Town. L205 mandated the Palaces and Properties Agency demolish fifty homes in Christiania, construct four hundred new condominiums, charge market rental rates and turn management of the district over to a private leasing company. To Christianians, the scheme represented practically everything they'd stood against, and most residents refused to abide. Unlike previous governments though, Rasmussen's didn't back down. It reinforced its efforts with heavy police intervention and a public relations smear campaign—including dramatic sting operations and petty drug busts that yielded few results but made the evening news—that turned many Danes against the once-tolerated, even beloved commune.

During the police action in May 2007, the government's stated objective was to demolish a rundown squatter's shack known as the "Cigarkassen" or "Cigar Box"; by late afternoon, government workers had reduced it to rubble. But at Christiania's southwest entrance, the insurgency had begun. Pale, waifish Danes wearing hoodies and backpacks darted through Christiania's alleys and surrounding streets, hurling bottles and rocks at policemen. Near Christiania's infamous Pusher Street, a television camera caught an officer clubbing a young man in a yellow T-shirt to the ground.

More vans arrived and protesters set barricades of furniture, tires, and cars on fire. Police reinforcements were summoned from all over the city, and the sound of sirens filled the streets. Over the next few days, word spread throughout Europe that Christiania was under attack, and hundreds of supporters from inside and outside the country poured into Copenhagen. As officers dressed in bulky, black riot gear flooded Christiania's gates, the government braced itself for what would be one of the most violent episodes in Copenhagen's recent history. And residents in Christiania dug in for what appeared to be Free Town's last stand.

The 1960s were fertile years for micro-nations—the liberalism of the time manifested itself in tiny islands of autonomy. Erwin Strauss's 1984 book, *How to Start Your Own Country,* attributes many of the era's breakaway provinces to the writings of Ayn Rand. In 1969, a group of Rand followers robbed a bar to fund the fictitious nation of Oceana. Oceanians didn't have an exact site for their country, but boot camps were established to train citizens to defend it. At one point the group even planned to steal a nuclear missile to stave off potential enemies.

Most "ephemeral states"—like American Michael J. Oliver's "Republic of Minerva," founded in 1972 on a pile of sand Oliver dumped on a pair of reefs north of Tonga—didn't fare as well as Christiania. (A Tongan chief ran Oliver off.) Neither did "Sealand," created in 1967 by Paddy Roy Bates on a six-thousand-square-foot World War II anti-aircraft platform seven miles off the coast of Britain. Bates was ousted by his own "prime minister" in 1978 but won the platform back after a daring helicopter raid.

From its inception, however, Christiania was less the brainchild of a single person than a response to a collective yearning. In 1971, a group of locals broke down the wall to Copenhagen's abandoned, and increasingly derelict, Bådsmandsstrædes army base. One hundred and fifty squatters followed, making homes in whatever spaces they could find. Anarchy buzzed in the streets of Copenhagen. The May 1968 student uprisings in Paris and subsequent Danish student protests in the spring of 1970 had given young artists and students confidence and purpose. A squatter movement cropped up in Copenhagen in response to a growing housing crisis and displeasure with the Danish government. After the invaders took the Bådsmandsstrædes army base, the alternative Copenhagen weekly, *Hovedbladet,* ran the headline, IMMIGRATE WITH BUS NO. 8—THE DIRECT ROUTE TO CHRISTIANIA, and hundreds more arrived at Christiania's gates.

Police attempted to rout the settlers but were overwhelmed by their numbers. Looking to avoid violent confrontation, Danish officials gave Christianians three years to try their "experiment." But the following year the officials went back on their word and ordered the area cleared. Supporters swarmed the grounds and the police were outnumbered once again. This time the government decided to let Christiania "stay until further notice."

All the while, Christianians expanded the infrastructure of their budding micro-nation. A housing office was established in the Rosenhuset building to process prospective tenants and manage maintenance for the area's 170 structures. Residents began weekly common meetings to decide community issues like garbage disposal, large-scale construction projects, tenant applications, water, electricity, and government relations. The community's first rules: no buying, selling, or trading of homes; no violence; no gang affiliations; no guns; no cars. A law prohibiting hard drugs (but not *all* drugs) was added after a run-in with heroin addicts in the late 1970s.

I'd heard about Christiania while researching "temporary autonomous zones" (or T.A.Z.'s, as named by anarchist writer Hakim Bey), and flew to Copenhagen in early 2006 to see the community before the bulldozers arrived. Beneath the orange glow of a new condo complex across the street and Denmark's first snowfall of the year, Christiania appeared more like a village from a Hans Christian Andersen tale than a self-ruling suburb. Small cottages balanced on top of one-room guardhouses; hobbit-esque shacks sported dragon-shaped chimneys. I could see meadows and giant maples and rock-lined pathways.

The area was so expansive it took my Ghanaian taxi driver nine repetitions of the word *Christiania*—accentuated by jabbings of his index finger—to demark the borders of the neighborhood's northwestern wall. He was excited to be here. He did the things in Free Town that people do in anarchist communes—talk politics, buy hash, and hang with his buddies in the pub long after the bars of Copenhagen had closed. It's a "good place," he quipped as we approached the northwest gate. Then he glanced across the street at the condo complex and said, "It will soon look like that."

A foot of snow had piled up—a surprise storm for a maritime city surrounded by water—by the time I rendezvoused with my host for the next ten days, an excitable fifty-three-year-old named Emmerik Warburg who'd discovered Christiania thirty-two years before, as a young artist. He brushed the snow from his jacket and loaded my bag onto his bike, a local Christiania design with two wheels and a cargo box on the front.

Emmerik led me down Christiania's main drag, the Long Road, past an old officers' barracks that had been transformed into modish, Bohemian apartments. He pointed out the "Raisin House," an after-school children's center that used solar power and composting toilets. Beyond that was a hole-in-the-wall

caption tk

vegetarian restaurant and, to the right, the terminus of Pusher Street, where dealers once sold hash from elaborately designed stands before the police shut them down in 2004.

We turned right at a carousel-size Buddhist stupa with a string of prayer flags circling it and two burning candles inside, then passed through a brick archway which opened into a clutch of interconnected homes. The complex was called Mælkebøtten ("Dandelion") for the flowers that covered its common meadow in the summer. The whole enclosure, including the apartment I was to stay in for the next week, used to be a grenade factory, Emmerik explained. "Don't worry," he said. "They've all been taken away."

The apartment's interior was surprisingly clean, with touches of classic Danish design. Almost all the building material in Christiania is recycled. The front hall light was fashioned from a paper cylinder wrapped around a low-wattage fluorescent bulb, with a circular CD case fit into the bottom as a dimmer. Another low-wattage bulb over the bed was entombed in a coffee can. The woodstove was also a local design—half a fifty-gallon drum laid on its side with the vent on top. But the gas heater worked best, Emmerik said, as he leapt out the window to turn on the tank.

Things had been a bit tense around the neighborhood, he went on as he scrambled back through the window. There was lots going on. Lots to do. New Year's Day had marked the first L205 deadline—meaning that on January 1, the government was supposed to start demolishing houses. A few days before the holiday, though, residents received a letter saying the deadline had been extended. Still, he said, they were divided as to what to do. Some wanted to cut a deal; others refused to ac-

knowledge the government's claims. The division ran so deep, Emmerik said, that half the town had skipped the last general meeting.

Christiania had changed, he said. Back in the day, residents acted as one. There was no obstacle too large for them to tackle. They managed massive construction projects, like laying sewer lines by hand and renovated thousands of square feet of rundown buildings, without a penny from the government. Now, he said, the government refused to acknowledge the collective and dealt with Christianians individually. And infighting was crippling Free Town's efforts to fight back.

It's somewhere between ironic and ordained that Christiania was established on the former site of much historic Danish military action. The city ramparts on the eastern border of the neighborhood, first built in 1617, were reinforced later that century after Sweden's siege of Copenhagen. The Bådsmandsstrædes base, while active, housed the Royal Artillery Regiment as well as ammunitions laboratories and depots.

The following day, Emmerik walked me through the base to show what Christiania's settlers had done with the place. Poisonous-gas testing chambers in Mælkebøtten had been transformed into airy pieds-à-terre with flower boxes, pastel-trimmed dormers, and wind chimes. Nearby in the Fabriksområdet district, blacksmith Charlotte Steen had renovated a bomb factory—designed to have the roof blow off in an explosion—into a Usonian town house, complete with a ship's bow and oak rafters collected from old boathouses in Holmen. One of the most stunning homes in Christiania was occupied by machinist Helge Pyramide. Over nine years, he constructed his twelve-sided house, "The Twelve-Edge," using roofing tiles from a sugar factory and volcanic ash for insulation.

"The government can't seem to figure out how to solve this Christiania problem," Emmerik exclaimed as we strolled past a girl brushing a pony in one of Christiania's eighteen stables. "We keep telling them, we already *have*! We've been doing it for almost forty years!"

The defining characteristic of Christiania's homes, Emmerik explained, comes from the fact that it's against the rules to sell or trade them. Real estate speculators—and the excessive appreciation of property values—ritually kill art communities in the world's greatest cities, he continued. In Christiania, when residents move, they simply pack up their belongings and leave. So house design is based solely on the owner's needs, not resale value or even building codes. The result is some of the most innovative and acclaimed architecture in Europe. Several books have been published on Christiania's eclectic aesthetic. Well-known architects, like Merete Ahnfeldt-Mollerup from Denmark's Royal Academy, regale the district as a kind of "adaptive reuse" laboratory.

Christiania has come up with several social innovations as well, Emmerik said. After the ban on hard drugs in 1979, the community initiated a drug-rehabilitation program that cured 80 percent of participants. (Five percent was considered successful in Copenhagen at the time.) Collective property management gave the poor and handicapped a higher standard of living while simultaneously creating a nurturing environment for artists. Every year the community feeds thousands of homeless and poor people on Christmas Eve at a massive banquet thrown in the Gray Hall. Businesses like Christiania Bikes (the maker of Emmerik's ride) have received government awards for entrepreneurialism and ship their products all over the world.

Emmerik explained the financial workings of Free Town as we strolled past the community kindergarten, designed to integrate children into society by using neighbors' yards as a playground. (In the 1970s, students were fed macrobiotic food, toy weapons were banned, and children held their own meetings.) All of Christiania's tenants pay a $380-a-month "use fee," regardless of the size of their home, and businesses pay according to their potential for profit. The cash is then put in a pot and divided between public programs like the building office (for structural repairs), children's facilities, the post office, a weekly newspaper, recycling, public toilets, water, and electricity. Christiania then pays the government a group value-added tax and additional funds for public services like water and electricity. (Since the 1990s, the government has commended Christianians as "model citizens" for never missing a payment.)

Leftover New Year's Eve fire-

works boomed overhead as we walked along the ramparts in Free Town's eastern quarter. A spotted mutt the size of a greyhound trotted by, and Emmerik boasted that because Christiania's dogs go leashless, they are more docile. Gingerbread shacks with rainbows and Shivas painted on their walls practically abutted the water. The front window on one was broken, and the owner had left a note that read, "If you are going to steal, then at least do it from people who can afford insurance." Across a small bridge leading to the other side of the moat, Emmerik pointed to another sign. This one announced a meeting to refuse the municipal government's demand that everyone declare an individual address. (Christiania still uses a common mailbox: DK-1440, Copenhagen.)

We ended the tour near an afterschool center. There was a small beach and a canoe on the shore. Emmerik said the community built the center to keep kids out of trouble after school. Then he pointed to a mock real-estate sign posted on the side of a hill that read, THE FREE STATE CHRISTIANIA IS NOT AND WILL NEVER BE FOR SALE.

The edict echoed a well-known quote from Ahnfeldt-Mollerup regarding the government's desire to shut Christiania down. It was not so much anarchy the government wanted to control, he wrote, as it was proprietorship of a successful venture:

> Each and every little village in every corner of [Denmark] now has a small shop where one can purchase the style that already can be found at Christiania. So one can wonder about the anger and aversion many of the conservatives feel about this quarter's culture, one can wonder why Christiania should be replaced by conventional housing at just this point when the quarter's maladjusted style has become so mainstream. Perhaps the point is actually that it should not be torn down, but instead that bourgeois Denmark wants to buy Christiania and is displeased about it not being for sale.

By 9 a.m. on May 16, 2007, the fires around Christiania had died out. Workers cleared barricades while commuters pedaled along Prinsessegade Road to the Knippelsbro Bridge. The air still smelled like burning rubber, but on Pusher Street, hash dealers were already out, covertly peddling sticks of Afghan crème.

The Copenhagen daily newspaper, *Politiken,* condemned the police raid as needless provocation. The Palaces and Properties Agency asserted that the Cigar Box had to be demolished under the auspices of L205. By midday, Christianians had rebuilt the structure. That afternoon, they held a house-warming party hosted by one of Denmark's best-known DJs.

The standoff continued through the summer, and Christiania's lawyer, Knud Foldschack, threatened to file seven hundred property-rights lawsuits if the government continued to pursue L205.

Deadlock had long been Christiania's best defense. By the time lawsuits were decided, often a new government—looking to avoid controversy—had taken over the Folketing and buried the case. Foldschack estimated that his seven hundred cases would take a year to settle once filed, at which point the political landscape could change dramatically. The wait, he said, would be worth it. "You can only destroy a situation, a possibility, like Christiania, once," he said. "You can never restore it."

But Rasmussen called for and won—albeit by a slimmer margin—a surprise early election in the fall of 2007 and secured a second term. In Christiania, optimism dimmed. Ten to twenty police patrols a week randomly searched homes and hassled residents. (A year before, Amnesty International had called for an "independent mechanism for the investigation of human rights violations by the police" in Christiania.) Half the community wanted to fight the government; the other half wanted to take the government's offer to lease their homes at below-market rates. In the summer of 2008, Foldschack registered the lawsuits, and the fate of Christiania returned to the courts.

Many demonized Rasmussen's government for wanting to gain access to one of the last, and most valuable, undeveloped build-sites in the city. But residents like Richardt Lionheart said that, even before government intervention, Christiania was evolving into the sort of free-market community it had been founded in opposition to.

During my visit in 2006, Lionhart spoke of the darker currents beneath Christiania's bohemian surface and we continued the conversation via email until last winter. He first came to the neighborhood in January 1972, to put certain sociological and political beliefs into practice. A week after arriving, he moved into the "Blue House" with two women. The threesome took over the second floor, which had been a changing room for soldiers. They removed rows of steel lockers and set up a telephone and hot-water heater. They laid hardwood floors, decorated the place, and hosted meetings and parties. His greatest hardship in those days proved to be his relationships; eventually he moved out. When he returned two years later, he fixed up his own place and has lived there ever since.

Lionhart's first skepticism about Free Town came in 1984 when he was living in Colombia on a psychology research grant. That winter he received a letter from his brother, Eric, who'd been diagnosed with cancer and had fallen behind on his rent in Christiania. The district Eric lived in threatened to kick him out if he didn't pay. Richardt flew home and settled the debt, but, he said, things haven't been the same since.

A few years later, Richardt's neighbor died and his widow—a Swede who was new to Christiania—moved into her husband's house. But residents of the district told her she was not welcome. Richardt stepped in and, in keeping with Christiania rules, called a meeting to resolve the matter. Three days before the meeting, a posse broke into the woman's house, piled her belongings on the street, and reclaimed the home for someone of their choosing.

"Anarchy is a beautiful thing if people have very fucking high morals," he said. "If they don't, then it's lynch mobs. This was a lynch mob, I'd say. And the same with consensus democracy. You have to have very high morals to make it function. You have to have a very high level of energy as well."

There were other stories of arbitrary law and violence in Free Town. Since the beginning, the community used thugs to enforce rules and chase unwanted residents out of the neighborhood. In the housing pool, preferential treatment was sometimes given to applicants who had friends on the inside. In 2005, residents offered a troop of gay actors a home, then kicked them out after determining that they didn't comply with the "Christiania lifestyle." In 2004, a television journalist was violently threatened when he tried to erect a small house in Christiania, against neighborhood rules. The following spring, the drug scene on Pusher Street made headlines when six masked men fired automatic weapons into a crowd to avenge one of their members who'd been thrown out of Christiania. Several people were injured, and a twenty-six-year-old man was killed. In April of 2009, a twenty-two-year-old man's jaw was blown off and four others injured when an unknown perpetrator lobbed a grenade into a crowd outside Café Nemoland.

The government blew many of the stories out of proportion in its campaign to close Christiania, but some of its base assertions were grounded in disquieting facts. While Christianians refused to recognize the government's authority, two thirds of the community received welfare and used city and state services like hospitals, schools, and roads. More than one hundred residents owned cars, and, because they couldn't park in Free Town, they clogged the streets of Christianshavn with them.

One point almost everyone, including most Christianians, agreed on was the fact that Free Town's drug trade had become its Achilles' heel. On one hand, the $174-million-a-year business filled area shops, cafés, and restaurants and made the neighborhood the second most popular tourist stop in Denmark, after Tivoli. On the other, it brought violence and a power imbalance that diminished Christiania's community mentality.

One night during my stay, I visited a former hash dealer some friends had introduced me to. "Andy" unlocked six deadbolts on two doors to let me into his apartment. He lived in Frederick's Arc, the largest timber-frame structure in Denmark and site of the 1979 heroin blockade. He'd put on weight since he stopped dealing and now went to the gym every day and played with the Christiania soccer club. His biceps and neck were well defined. He had a buzz cut and shifty blue eyes, seemingly aware of every movement in the room at all times.

Andy's apartment was outfitted with nearly everything a twen-

caption tk

tysomething bachelor could want—and, seemingly, everything Christiania historically opposed. The living room was appointed with a leather wrap-around couch and a pool-table-size wide-screen TV. The kitchen was equipped with a multitude of fancy stainless-steel appliances and granite counters. The hardwood floors were sparkling new.

After starting as a runner on Pusher Street in the late '90s, when he was fifteen, Andy eventually set up his own stand in 2001. Individual busts were frequent leading up to the 2004 raid, he said, but the risk was worth it. When he was twenty years old, he was clearing one to two thousand dollars a day. He took extravagant snowboarding trips to Switzerland and spent twelve thousand dollars once on a two-week bender in Miami. He didn't work on Christiania's public projects or attend meetings. In a socialist country where income tax ranges from 43 to 63 percent, Andy was an instant member of Copenhagen's nouveau riche.

Since he quit pushing, Andy had been trying to reinvent himself. He pointed out a painting he'd been working on that seemed like an interesting abstract until he explained that it was a depiction of an enraged dragon breathing fire. I asked about an assortment of electronic equipment in the corner and he said he was also learning how to DJ. When I inquired what he thought of L205, he answered that he hoped it would pass over, that things would stay the way they were. "I do what the lawyers tell me," he said. "I just give them money and trust they will do the right thing."

I went the following night to see Pusher Street for myself. The alley was empty, apart from three eidolic shapes crowded around a fire smoldering in a fifty-gallon drum. I approached a middle-aged woman reclining on a pile of wood chips and asked if she was selling. She nodded and asked how much I wanted. I told her I had one hundred kroner. She pulled a black stick from her pocket the size of a small pencil and I handed her the money.

I went into Woodstock—Christiania's first bar, which opened in April 1974—and was hit by a wall of blue smoke and blaring country music. The bartender was either very drunk or very strange and laughed every time I counted out on my fingers how many beers I wanted, which was one. I found a seat at a long pine picnic table in the back and rolled a joint. As I tapped the butt on the table, a woman at the other end spilled her hash on the floor and yelled at me. She circled the table, alternately pointing and screaming for the next five minutes. When I finished rolling, she slammed her fist on the table and yelled, "Remember that?!"

I smoked the joint quickly and left. The clouds had receded for the first time since I arrived and there were a few stars overhead. I walked down Long Road, past the Raisin House and the stupa. The candles under the Buddha had been replaced and were burning, and a few lights were on in the surrounding homes. Less than a half mile from downtown Copenhagen, I couldn't hear any traffic or any noise at all. I thought of Emmerik and the orig-

inal vision of Christiania and knew for certain that it was long gone. But walking into Mælkebøtten with blue moonlight reflecting off the courtyard, I still had to wonder whether that meant this place shouldn't exist.

French philosopher Michel Foucault said that there are no such things as utopias. A true utopia, he said in his 1967 lecture, "Of Other Spaces," is a figment of our imagination. It is merely a concept of society in its perfected state. What people refer to as utopias, he said, are in fact heterotopias, "simultaneously mythic and real contestation[s] of the space in which we live."

"There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization," he says,

> Real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.

Heterotopias come in many forms. From sacred grounds of ancient cultures to military schools in the twentieth century to cemeteries today, they reflect a certain aspect of the society they reside in. They also typically occupy a certain era, Foucault said, when "men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."

In May 2009, it seemed Christiania's era was drawing to a close. The Eastern High Court ruled in favor of the Palaces and Properties Agency in the cases Foldschack had filed. Christianians decided to appeal to the supreme court. The court said it would announce a decision in January 2011, and the waiting game was back on.

Four months later, Christiania celebrated its thirty-eighth birthday with a day of parades, free food, and DJs. Supporters showed up in Native American garb and tie-dyed T-shirts. The mood was upbeat, but in photos and videos of the scene it looked more like a historical reenactment of the 1970s—complete with dozens of tourists watching from a safe distance—than a celebration of a thriving community. "As time goes by, I guess people are getting more realistic and are less positive to the communistic ideas," Lionhart wrote. "There's nobody today who defends communism. There's nobody who talks in the local paper at all. It's like everybody here just wants to have the right opinion instead of having their own opinion."

The comment reminded me of an experience I had just before I left Free Town in 2006 that seemed to speak to both the neighborhood's resilient spirit and its conflicted identity. I'd spent the evening alone in the Moonfisher Café, contemplating the many faces of Christiania. Two ceiling fans pushed thick tobacco and hash smoke around the coffee shop. I bought an espresso and set it on a homemade steel table. A few drunks laughed loudly in the corner. Pool balls clicked in the back room. A lookout announced that a police patrol was approaching, and smokers quickly shuffled hash and rolling papers into their pockets. The cops arrived, young-looking Danes with blue eyes, blond hair, and padded riot gear. When they left ten minutes later a woman at the bar yelled, "We got you!" and bowed in mock reverence. A few seconds after that, a massive bottle rocket exploded beside the patrol.

In the bar, joints came out again and conversations continued with hardly a pause. I left and ran into a young girl and boy outside the entrance, cherub-faced Danes no more than six or seven years old. They'd rebuilt a snow barricade meant to slow police patrols. I smiled and waved. After ten days in Christiania, I was starting to feel like a local myself. They stared back and the girl told me it would cost one hundred kroner to pass.

"I don't have one hundred kroner," I said, grinning.

"Eighty," she answered.

"Twenty?" I asked.

"Sixty."

"Thirty?"

The girl scratched her head, glanced at the boy. I gave her a pleading look and she said, "One hundred." I laughed and flipped her a twenty kroner piece. She and the boy inspected it as I scaled the wall. When I got one leg over the top they pelted me with two snowballs, square in the back. ✭